

## CLAIMS

1. A method of treating sewage sludge to reduce the pathogen content of said sludge, the method comprising the steps of:

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(c) adding to the sludge an effective amount of a phosphorus-containing compound; and

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(d) keeping the phosphorus-containing compound in contact with the sludge for sufficient time to reduce the amount of pathogens present in the sludge by an amount equivalent to a logarithmic reduction of 2 or more.

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2. A method as claimed in claim 1 in which the log reduction of 2 or more is achieved over a 24-hour period.

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3. A method as claimed in claim 1 in which the phosphorus-containing compound is kept in contact with the sludge for sufficient time to reduce the amount of pathogens present in the sludge by a log reduction of 3 or more.

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4. A method as claimed in claim 3 in which the phosphorus-containing compound is kept in contact with the sludge for sufficient time to reduce the amount of pathogens present in the sludge by a log reduction of 4 or more.

5. A method as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which the pathogens are bacteria.

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6. A method as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which the sludge has undergone anaerobic digestion prior to step (a).

7. A method as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which the phosphorus-containing compound is a phosphonium compound.

8. A method as claimed in claim 7 in which the phosphonium compound is a tetrakis(hydroxyorgano)phosphonium salt or compound of formula (I)



10 wherein:

n is the valency of X;

R' and R'', which may be the same or different, are selected from an alkyl, hydroxyalkyl, alkenyl or aryl moiety and X is an anion.

15 9. A method as claimed in claim 8 in which R' and R'' are between 1 and 20 carbon atoms in length.

10. A method as claimed in claim 8 or claim 9 in which X is selected from the group consisting of chloride, sulphate, phosphate, acetate, 20 oxalate and bromide.

11. A method as claimed in any one of claims 8 to 10 in which the phosphonium compound is tetrakis(hydroxymethyl) phosphonium sulphate.

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12. A method as claimed in any one of claims 8 to 10 in which the phosphonium compound is selected from tetrakis(hydroxymethyl) phosphonium chloride, tetrakis(hydroxymethyl)phosphonium bromide, tetrakis(hydroxymethyl)phosphonium phosphate, tetrakis (hydroxymethyl) phosphonium acetate or tetrakis(hydroxymethyl)phosphonium oxalate.

13. A method as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 6 in which the phosphorus-containing compound is an alkyl-substituted phosphine as shown in formula (II):

5 (CH<sub>2</sub>OH R<sub>2</sub>) P (II)

wherein:

each R, which may be the same or different, is selected from a alkyl, hydroxyalkyl, alkenyl or aryl moiety.

10 14. A method as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which the amount of phosphorus-containing compound to be added to the sludge in step (a) of the method of the present invention is up to 10000mg/l.

15. A method as claimed in claim 14 in which the amount of  
15 phosphorus-containing compound to be added to the sludge in step (a) of  
the method of the present invention is 100-2500mg/l.

16. A method as claimed in claim 15 in which the amount of phosphorus-containing compound to be added to the sludge in step (a) of the method of the present invention is 200-1000mg/l.

17. A method as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 13 in which the amount of phosphorus-containing compound to be added to the sludge is expressed relative to dry solids weight and the amount to be added is up to about 30% by weight of dry solids.

18. A method as claimed in claim 17 in which the amount of phosphorus-containing compound to be added is from 0.1 to 20% by weight of dry solids.

19. A method as claimed in claim 18 in which the amount of phosphorus-containing compound to be added is from 0.1 to 10% by weight of dry solids.

5 20. A method as claimed in claim 17 in which the amount of phosphorus-containing compound to be added is from 0.2 to 5% by weight of dry solids.

10 21. A method as claimed in claim 17 in which the amount of phosphorus-containing compound to be added is from 0.4 to 2% by weight of dry solids.

15 22. A method as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which step (b) of the method of the present invention is carried out over a period of from 1 second to 14 days.

20 23. A method as claimed in claim 22 in which step (b) of the method of the present invention is carried out over a period of from 6 to 24 hours.

25 24. A method as claimed in claim 22 in which step (b) of the method of the present invention may be carried out over a period of from 15 seconds to 24 hours.

25 25. A method as claimed in any one claims 1 to 4 and claims 6 to 24 in which the pathogens present in the sludge are selected from the group consisting of bacteria, viruses, protozoans and helminths.

30 26. A method as claimed in claim 5 and 25 in which the bacteria are selected from the group consisting of *Escherichia coli*, *Salmonella* spp., *Shigella* spp., *Vibrio cholerae*, *Bacillus cereus*, *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Campylobacter* spp. and *Yersinia pestis*.

27. A method as claimed in claim 25 in which the viruses are selected from the group consisting of rotaviruses, calciviruses, group F adenoviruses and astroviruses.

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28. A method as claimed in claim 25 in which the protozoans are selected from the group consisting of *Entamoeba spp.*, *Giardia spp.*, *Balantidium coli* and *Cryptosporidium spp.*

10 29. A method as claimed in claim 25 in which the helminths are selected from the group consisting of *Ascaris lumbricoides* (roundworm), *Trichuris trichiura* (whipworm), *Ancylostoma duodenale* (hookworm), *Strongyloides stercoralis* (threadworm), *Schistosoma spp.*, *Taenia saginata* (beef tapeworm), *Taenia solium* (pork tapeworm) and their eggs.

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30. A sewage sludge that has been treated according to the method as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 29.

31. A method of treating sewage sludge substantially as described  
20 herein with reference to the accompanying examples and figures.

32. A treated sludge substantially as described herein with reference to the accompanying examples and figures.

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